Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

World History

Age of Exploration:

What Voyagers Encountered in the 15th and 16th Centuries

**Document A**

**Treasure fleets of the Dragon Throne**

**The Middle Kingdom reaches out**

Zheng He, Muslim eunuch and confidant of the Chinese emperor, organized six long-distance naval expeditions to the south and west of China from 1403 to 1433. Each involved thousands of men, including professional negotiators, diplomats, interpreters, scribes, signalers, doctors, soldiers, mechanics, and other specialists. The fleet consisted of over one hundred auxiliary ships, including troop and supply carriers and forty to sixty “treasure ships.” These were estimated to weigh some 1,500 tons and range up to 400 feet in length, with three decks, nine masts, twelve sails, and watertight compartments to keep them afloat even when damaged. Besides ample supplies, they carried Chinese trade goods.

Their destinations, ports in India, Arabia, and East Africa, were not unknown. There is evidence that Chinese in earlier centuries sailed regularly to India and occasionally to the Persian Gulf, and they knew about East Africa at least from hearsay. Zheng He himself had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Having generally followed a contemporary’s advice to “treat the barbarian kings like harmless seagulls,” the expeditions traveled over 30,000 miles and returned with “wonderful precious things,” among them a giraffe. With no need for ongoing supplies from abroad, no desire for conquest at a distance, and no cultural tradition of proselytizing, they built no forts and left neither garrisons nor naval patrols.

Some Confucian government officials opposed the long-distance voyages as a waste of money, especially since deforestation at this time raised the costs of shipbuilding. They felt the government would do better to invest in containment of belligerent Mongols and other pastoral peoples who lived along China’s northwestern frontier. In fact, nomad raids were not uncommon, so these officials had good reason for concern. Confucian bureaucrats also feared that the court eunuchs, a powerful political faction, were threatening their power and influence. Consequently, the Ming government banned further large-scale maritime expeditions to the Indian Ocean after 1433, though Chinese trade in the East and South China seas continued.

The following account of Zheng He’s voyages is from an inscription on a stone he ordered erected in the winter of 1431-32. The last paragraph is from a different inscription.

The Imperial Ming Dynasty, in unifying seas and continents, surpasses [earlier] dynasties. The countries beyond the horizon and at the ends of the earth have all become subjects and to the most western of the western, or the most northern of the northern countries, however far they may be, the distances and the routes may [now] be calculated. Thus the barbarians from beyond the seas, though their countries are truly distant … have come to audience bearing precious objects and presents.

The Emperor, approving their loyalty and sincerity, has ordered us [Zheng He] and others at the head of several thousands of officers and troops to [board] more than a hundred large ships to go and confer presents on them, in order to [make clear] the transforming power of the imperial virtue, and to treat distant people with kindness. From [1405] until now, we have several times been appointed ambassadors to the Western Ocean. The barbarian countries we have visited are [among others, Java, Siam, Ceylon, Calicut in India, Aden on the Red Sea, and Mogadishu in East Africa], all together more than thirty countries large and small.

We have crossed more than one hundred thousand li of immense water spaces, and have seen in the ocean huge waves like mountains rising sky-high, and we have set eyes on barbarian regions far away hidden in the blue transparency of light vapors, while our sails, loftily unfurled like clouds, day and night continued their course, crossing those savage waves as if we were treading a public thoroughfare.

Those among foreigners who were resisting the transforming influence of Chinese culture and were disrespectful, we captured alive, and brigands who indulged in violence and plunder, we exterminated. Consequently the sea route was purified and tranquillized and the natives were enabled to pursue their vocations.

Source: Qtd. in Joseph R. Levenson, European Expansion and the Counter-Example of Asia, 1300-1600 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 14-5; last paragraph qtd. in Michael Pearson, The Indian Ocean (New York: Routledge, 2003), 90.

**Document B**

**Sailing, raiding, and trading on the Guinea Coast Portugal’s Prince Henry orders ships to explore the African shore**

Starting about 1415, Prince Henry, often called The Navigator, consistently sent out two or three ships a year to sail as far south along the western shore of Africa as they could. Captained typically by courtier “gentlemen of his household,” they averaged about fifty tons, and needed crews of only twenty-five sailors. He financed the enterprise from the king’s grant to him of a 20 percent share in all profits from any voyages to West Africa, from the sale of licenses to do so, and from his income from sugar plantations on the island of Madeira. In spite of these resources, he was in debt, owing his bastard half-brother 35,478 crowns of gold, an obligation not paid off until after his death in 1460.

By this time, some fifty ships had passed south of Cape Bojador on the coast of the western Sahara Desert. Twenty years later, a dozen or so Portuguese ships a year made the voyage to West Africa’s Gold Coast, cutting into the profits of the Muslim merchants who had monopolized the traditional trans-Saharan gold routes to the Mediterranean coast. Each ship carried some 700 kilos of gold to Portugal, as well as slaves, ivory, a spice similar to pepper, and other merchandise. For these, the Portuguese traded textiles, iron, brass, glass, and hardware.

The gold was sorely needed in Europe to pay for Asian luxuries in high demand there. By contrast, demand in India and China for European goods was sluggish at best, so payment had mostly to be made in gold.

From about 1460 on, the Portuguese cultivated friendly relations with the powerful rulers of West African kingdoms as a matter of policy. Their lively trade with the locals, which during the second half of the fifteenth century seemed to have been satisfactory to both parties, centered on the forts of Arguin and Elmina that they had built on the coast. To protect the West African trade and its profits, the king decreed in 1481 that any foreign ship visiting the Guinea coast without his license could be sunk or captured, no questions asked, and the crew thrown to the sharks.

The Portuguese historian Azuarara was charged by his king to write a record of the discovery and conquest of Guinea (West Africa). The events he describes all took place before 1450, when he finished the account from which the following excerpts are taken. Note that the Portuguese called all Muslims “Moors.”

After the taking of Ceuta [in Muslim North Africa, 1415] he always kept ships well armed against the Infidel, both for war, and because he had a wish to know the land that lay beyond Cape Bojador, for up to his time [nothing] was known with any certainty about the land beyond that Cape. [Muslim knowledge extended little further, nowhere near Africa’s southern tip.] … Since it seemed to him that without knowledge no mariners or merchants would ever. . . sail to a place where there is not a sure … hope of profit, he sent out his own ships.

If there chanced … to be havens into which it would be possible to sail without peril … the products of this realm might be taken there, which traffic would bring great profit to our countrymen.

[Also] he sought to know if there were in those parts any Christian princes, [who] would aid him against the enemies of the faith. [Moreover, it] was his great desire to make increase in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ and to bring to him all the souls that should be saved…

[In 1441, one of Prince Henry’s nobles] armed a very fine caravel [to sail past Cape Bojador. The Prince] ordered him to have regard to no other profit, save only to see and know any new thing that he could. And he was not to [make] raids in the land of the Moors, but to take his way straight to the land of the Negroes and thenceforward to lengthen his voyage as much as he could. [Another purpose of the voyage was] to ship a cargo of the skins and oil of sea-wolves [seals]. [When they had loaded this, the captain called together the 21 men on the ship, and said:] “We have already got our cargo … and may well turn back, … but O how fair a thing it would be if we, come to this land for a cargo of such petty merchandise, were … to bring the first captives before the face of our Prince … getting knowledge by that means. And as to our reward, you can estimate what that will be by the great expense and toil he has undertaken in years past, only for this end. [This captain made several voyages to the “land of the Negroes,” also known to the Portuguese as “Guinea,” and was the first to bring back both captives and gold dust from West Africa to Portugal. Traffic in slaves accelerated from then on.]

[In 1446, having been granted a license by Prince Henry to travel to West Africa, a Portuguese] made him ready two caravels, one decked and the other a fishing-boat, in which were twenty men. “Let us go” [he said] “to the … river where I promised the Moors the year before that I would come and traffic.” … After three days were passed, the Moors began to arrive, and [he] began to speak with them by means of his interpreters, asking them to have some Guineans brought there, in exchange for whom he would give them cloth.

[The same year, pitched battles were fought between the natives and Portuguese seamen. The latter’s captains addressed their men before the battle.] “It is for war, and war alone, that we are come to this land; and this being so, we must not be timid, for if we fight our battle by day it will be much more to our honor than if we fight by night, attacking the Moors … and expelling them by sheer force of arms rather than by any cunning or stratagem.” … The Christians, besides the desire they had to get at them, when they saw their behavior, which was that of enemies who despised them, felt doubly eager to fight. … The enemy … boldly trusting in their multitude, [thought] that victory would hasten to them as it had come the other day when they slew the seven men from the other [Portuguese] caravels. … The Christians, in order to gain the land, and the Moors in order to prevent them, began their fight, plying their lances, by which there could well be seen the hatred there was between them. But the fight on the part of the Moors was not so much from enmity as in defense of their women and children, and still more for the salvation of their own lives. Our men wondered greatly at the courage they perceived in their enemies. . . Yet, God being willing to aid His own, they slew out of hand sixteen and the others were routed. … [We] took fifty-seven of them, and with them returned to the caravels.

[It remains for me to fix the certain number of souls of infidels who have come from those lands to this, through the virtues and talents of our glorious Prince. And I counted these souls and found they were nine hundred twenty and seven, of whom … the greater part were turned into the true path of salvation.

Source: Charles Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestage, trans. and eds., The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea, by Gomes Eannes de Azuarara (London: Hakluyt Society, vol. 1, 1896, vol. 2, 1899), Vol. 1: 27-30, 40-1, 109; Vol. 2: 163-70, 225, 230-5, 267-8, 288-9.

**Document C**

**“This is the first voyage and the routes taken by the Admiral Don Cristóbal Colón when he discovered the Indies”**

Before his voyages across the North Atlantic, Columbus had lived in port cities in Italy, Spain, and Portugal. He had sailed with at least one of the Portuguese voyages to Guinea, and he married into a family of cartographers. He spent nearly a decade seeking royal funding for his own plan to access Asia by sailing west. His conviction that he could get there by his novel way was based on a miscalculation of the earth’s circumference and on authorities of the time that assumed a narrow and island-studded Atlantic. He did not figure on stumbling across a whole continent between Europe and Asia.

Spain’s monarchs financed his enterprise with funds freed up by the victorious outcome of their war against Moorish Granada, and with loans from a Genoese banker. In addition, the town of Palos, from where he departed, had to provide him (as a penalty for some crime against the crown) with a crew of ninety, which included two pilots, two physicians, a surgeon, and an interpreter who spoke Arabic and Hebrew. He had three ships, estimated to have been between 50 and 100 tons and 50 to 60 feet long. One of these ships was lost during the first voyage. During his following three voyages, Columbus was to lose eight more ships. His contract with the crown, however, assured him “one-tenth of any merchandise bought, found, or acquired in any mainland and islands he may discover in the sea,” after deducting expenses. Nine-tenths went to the crown.

Crossing the Atlantic, he was out of sight of land for thirty-three days, amazing in a time when mariners were used to navigating largely by observing landmarks.

After the first voyage, Columbus’s mandate from Spain’s rulers changed from seeking converts, alliances, and trade to settlement and exploitation. For instance, from 1495 on, every native Hispaniolan over fourteen years old had to pay tribute money to the Spanish king and owed compulsory labor services in mines or on plantations to individual Spaniards.

The excerpts below from Columbus’ Journal were condensed by its sixteenth-century editor. Those in quotation marks were claimed to be words that Columbus spoke or wrote.

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Acting on the information that I had given to your Highnesses [the King and Queen of Spain] touching the lands of India, and respecting Gran Can [Great Khan, title of Mongol rulers in China] … your Highnesses as … Princes who love the holy Christian faith, and the propagation of it, and who are enemies to the sect of Mahoma … resolved to send me, Cristóbal Colón, to … India to see the said [ruler], and the cities and lands, and their disposition, with a view that they might be converted to our holy faith … and that I should go by way of the west, whither up to this day, we do not know for certain that any one has gone.”

Thursday, 11th of October They saw sandpipers, and … a bit of cane, a land plant … and a small branch covered with berries. … At two hours after midnight the land was sighted. … Presently they saw naked people. The Admiral went on shore in the armed boat … took the royal standard, and the captains … and said that they should bear faithful testimony that he … now took possession of the said island for the King and for the Queen. … Presently many inhabitants of the island assembled. … “I,” [said the Admiral] “that we might form great friendship, for I knew that they were a people who would be more easily … converted to our holy faith by love than by force, gave to some of them red caps, and glass beads to put around their necks, and many other things of little value, which gave them great pleasure. … They should be good servants and intelligent, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians. I … will take hence, at the time of our departure, six natives for your Highnesses, that they may learn to speak.”

Saturday, 13th of October “The people are very docile. … They give away all they have got, for whatever may be given to them, down to broken bits of crockery and glass.”

Sunday, 14th of October “These people are very simple as regards the use of arms, as you Highnesses will see from the seven that I caused to be taken, to bring home and learn our language and return; unless your Highnesses should order them all to be brought to Castile, or to be kept captives on the same island; for with fifty men they can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them.”

Friday, 19th of October “There are villages in the interior, where, the Indians I bring with me say, there is a king who has much gold. … I do not give much faith to what they say, as well because I do not understand them as because they are so poor in gold that even a little … would appear much to them.”

Monday, 12th of November “I … seized seven women, old and young, and three children. I did this because the men would behave better in Spain if they had women of their own land. … For on many occasions the men of Guinea have been brought to learn the language in Portugal, and afterwards, when they returned, and it was expected that they would be useful in their land, owing to … the gifts they had received, they never appeared after arriving.”

Wednesday, 26th of December The Admiral … knew our Lord had caused the ship to stop here, that a settlement might be formed. … “For it is certain that, if I had not lost the ship. … I should not have left people in the country during this voyage, [though] many people had asked me to give them leave to remain. Now I have given orders for a tower and a fort … with provision of bread and wine for more than a year, with seeds for sowing, the ship’s boat, a … carpenter, gunner and cooper [and forty four men].” He trusted in God that, when he returned from Spain … he would find a ton of gold collected by barter by those he was to leave behind, and that they would have found the mine, and spices in such quantities that the Sovereigns would … be able to … fit out an expedition to go and conquer the Holy Sepulcher.

**Document D**

**Breaking into the Eastern spice trade: an all-sea route to India becomes possible**

That India was on the other side of Africa and washed by a sea was known. That this sea connected to the Atlantic was in doubt until 1488. That year, the Portuguese mariner Dias, with his two fifty-ton ships, was unknowingly blown past the Cape to the east coast of Africa by a storm. A near-mutiny of his crew caused him to turn back soon after, but he had proved that the eastern end of the Atlantic was not land-locked. Leaving Portugal nearly ten years later, Vasco da Gama dealt with a mutiny near the same place by putting the ringleaders in chains and continued on to sail all the way to India.

Da Gama had learned navigation serving in the navy, and he was an experienced seaman. His voyage was financed in part with the confiscated property of the Jews and Moors expelled by the king in 1495. At first, his mandate from the king was to find direct access to spice suppliers. He had four ships, the largest 300 tons with twenty cannon, and 170 men, Dias among them. Of these, only two ships and fifty-five men returned in 1499.

In 1502, the Portuguese king named da Gama “Admiral of India … throughout the territories which shall be placed under [our] rule.” On his voyage that year, two Franciscan friars accompanied him as missionaries. His mandate this time was to “show the flag” in the East with a display of military might, strike against Muslim fleets and centers of trade, and gain a monopoly of Indian Ocean trade. This led him to attack Muslim ships whenever he could and to intimidate rulers around the Indian Ocean with threats and violence. He raided and killed inhabitants of fishing villages, locked pilgrim passengers into the hold before setting their ship on fire, and bombarded the towns of those resisting his demands.

Of his twenty-three ships, ten belonged to the king, and thirteen to wealthy merchant investors. By a royal decree of 1500, the latter owed the crown one-fourth of the value of the cargo they brought back, but they could still more than double their investment. Soon, the spice trade became a royal monopoly. Da Gama’s share of profits on this voyage was ten hundredweights of pepper worth 800 ducats (a ducat was worth about sixty grams of gold) and each sailor’s, half a hundredweight. He left half his fleet in India to protect the coastal trading posts he had set up, and to patrol Indian waters. The intent was to enforce a policy whereby any non-Portuguese ships in the Indian Ocean had to buy a Portuguese license to operate there, or be liable to losing their cargo, ship, and lives.

The following selections are from the journal of a crewmember, who described da Gama’s first Europe-to-India all-sea voyage. It involved sailing about 27,000 miles, some ninety days and some 4,000 miles of it out of sight of land.

We left [Portugal] on Saturday, 8th July 1497. May God our Lord permit us to accomplish this voyage in his service. Amen!

On Thursday, 3rd August [1497] we left [the Cape Verde islands. On November 4th] we tacked so as to come close to land, but as we failed to identify it, we again stood out to sea. [Some days later] we landed with the captain-major, and made captive one of the natives, [then] had him well dressed and sent ashore. On the following day fourteen or fifteen natives came to where our ships lay. … [We] showed them a variety of merchandise, with a view of finding out whether such things were to be found in their country. This merchandise included cinnamon, cloves, seed-pearls, gold, and many other things, but it was evident that they had no knowledge whatever of such articles. … Having careened our ships and taken in wood, we set sail. At that time we did not know how far we might be [from] the Cape of Good Hope. … We therefore stood out towards the south-south-west, and late on Saturday [18th November] we beheld the Cape. [Contrary winds prevented their rounding the Cape until the 22nd November]. … By Christmas Day … we had discovered seventy leagues of coast [beyond the furthest northeast that Dias had got to in 1488]. … Drinking water began to fail us, and our food had to be cooked with salt water. Our daily ration of water was reduced to [a cup-and-a-half].

11th January [1498] … we went close to shore, and saw a crowd of negroes. … The Captain major [da Gama] ordered Martin Afonso, who had been a long time in Manicongo [kingdom about 1000 miles by sea south of Guinea] to land. … The chief [there] said that we were welcome to anything in his country of which we stood in need: at least, this is how Martin Afonso understood him. … Two gentlemen of the country came to see us. They were very haughty, and valued nothing which we gave them. … A young man in their company—so we understood from their signs—came from a distant country, and had already seen ships like ours.

The people of this country [near Mozambique] are Mohammedans. … They are merchants, and have transactions with white Moors [Arabs] four of whose vessels were at this time in port, laden with gold, silver, cloves, pepper, ginger [and precious stones]. … We understood them to say that … where we were going … there was no need to purchase them as they could be collected in baskets. All this we learned through a sailor … who, having formerly been a prisoner among the Moors, understood their language.

The captain-general [presented the Sultan of Mozambique with] hats, [gowns], corals, and many other articles. He was, however, so proud that he treated all we gave him with contempt, and asked for scarlet cloth, of which we had none. … The captain-major … begged him for two pilots to go with us. He at once granted this request.

The lord of the place [a close-by port] sent many things to the captain-major. All this happened at the time when he took us for Turks or Moors from some foreign land. … But when they learnt that we were Christians they arranged to seize and kill us by treachery. … We forthwith armed our boats, placing bombards in their poops, and started for the village. … Our bombards soon made it so hot for them that they fled. … On 29th March we left.

Source: E. G. Ravenstein, trans. and ed., A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497-1499. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1898), 1, 3, 5-9, 16-7, 20-1, 23-5, 28, 30-1, 35-7, 39-40, 45-8.

**TASKS**

1. Briefly annotate each document.
2. In each document, what reason(s) is/are given for making the voyage? What textual evidence from the document tells us this?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Reasons for exploring unknown lands  & textual evidence to support it. |
| Document A |  |
| Document B |  |
| Document C |  |
| Document D |  |

1. What were the voyagers’ attitudes towards the people they met? Give textual evidence.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Voyagers’ attitudes towards people they met  & textual evidence to support it. |
| Document A |  |
| Document B |  |
| Document C |  |
| Document D |  |

1. As you read each document, what part(s) of it surprise(s) you?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | What Surprises You from the Document |
| Document A |  |
| Document B |  |
| Document C |  |
| Document D |  |